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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
The College of Fine and Applied Arts  
in the Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

TODAY'S WOMAN ON CANVAS

By

Rebecca Rudd Sizer

March 1, 1983



APPROVALS

Advisor: Fred Meyer

Date: 3/10/83

Associate Advisor: David Dickinson

Date: 2/17/83

Associate Advisor: Robert Heischman

Date: 2/18/83

Assistant to the Dean

for Graduate Affairs: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 12/15/83

Dean, College of

Fine & Applied Arts: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 3/11/1983

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Date: March 1, 1983

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to let me work out a problem myself and when to make me laugh at it. With Tod, I have been truly blessed.

RSRS

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Be patient toward all that is unresolved in your heart  
And try to love the questions themselves.  
Do not seek the answers that cannot be given you  
Because you will not be able to live them  
And the point is to live everything  
Live the questions now  
Perhaps you will gradually without noticing it  
Live along some distant day into the answers.

-Rainer Maria Rilke

## Chapter 1: Introduction

A work of art is a composition of tensions and resolutions, balance and imbalance, rhythmic coherence, a precarious yet continuous unity. Life is a natural process of such tensions, balances, rhythms; it is these that we feel in quietness or emotion as the pulse of our own living.<sup>1</sup>

-Susanne Langer

Art is a reflection of Life. Art and Life are composed of the same elements, it is simply a matter of hierarchy. Art is a part of Life, a subset. An artist creates an interpretation of that which fascinates him most about Life.



The subject of that interpretation can be anything concrete or abstract. John Cage, a contemporary composer, can explore chance in the creation of his artform and Chuck Close, a contemporary artist, can challenge the limits of photographic realism. Both are artists. Each has been struck by some element of Life and has become devoted to its study. Each produces work resulting from his experiences with the phenomenon that interests him. But, what makes these results Art and not mere experiments? Art is an interpretation of Life through the eyes and being of the artist. This unusual interpretation resounds in basic universal truths which are understood on levels of consciousness and unconsciousness. The unusual interpretation allows the viewer to respond to the universal truths on some level perhaps, as if he were experiencing them for the first time.

It is the artist's heightened ability to perceive his world in a different way that sets him apart from others. That perception is sophisticated and childlike at once. What may be ordinary and commonplace to most, the artist finds

profound. Funk and Wagnalls New Standard College Dictionary(1947) defines perception as:

1.) The act, power, process, or product of perceiving knowledge through the senses of the existence and properties of matter and the external world ; also cognition of fact or truth in general by the activity of thinking; as moral perception; apprehension; knowledge. 2.) The faculty or power of acquiring immediate and fundamental knowledge through the senses; often called sense perception or sense presentation; also the process of acquiring such knowledge, or the mental product so obtained, often called precept. 3.) Any insight or intuitive judgement that implies unusual discernment of fact or truth.<sup>2</sup>

As the artist perceives, he takes in information by means of his heightened senses; he is capable of perceiving some truth about the subject that others do not perceive readily. The artist has a heightened awareness of that which surrounds him. This awareness yields knowledge based on the surroundings as they are observed by the artist both subjectively and objectively. The artist uses both his

inward and his outward eyes. Through this heightened awareness of things inward and outward, he is able to perceive his experiences with unusual depth.

As the artist creates, he lives. He experiences tensions and resolutions during his creative process just as he experiences tensions and resolutions in his life. His art is a composition of these tensions and resolutions, balances and imbalances, all held in a precarious yet continuous unity. Art is not interesting if it is without this precariousness and neither is Life.

In the pages that follow, formal and philosophical concerns in my own creative process will be discussed. The collaboration of the inward and outward eyes will be traced as they influence the formulation of concerns, perception of subject matter, and the final rendering of the artwork. My own creative process is influenced by the challenge of depicting Today's Woman on canvas. For that reason, a chapter is devoted to a discussion on Today's Woman. That

chapter is then followed by the concluding chapter which discusses the synthesis of formal and philosophical concerns in my own creative process. Art reflects Life in that it is a product of Life and contributes to the aesthetic being of Life.

## Chapter 2: Formal Concerns

A work of art is a composition of tensions and resolutions, balance and imbalance, rhythmic coherence, a precarious unity.<sup>3</sup>

- Susanne Langer

The same elements that comprise Life, comprise Art. Life is composed of balances and imbalances, tensions and resolutions, serenity and precariousness. And so it is with Art, but what does this mean in more concrete terms? A piece of Art is like a piece of music. What makes a Chopin ballad a masterpiece? What makes it interesting everytime it is heard? It is composed of the same elements that maintain Life's fascination. First, there is an underlying structure which juxtaposes contrasting sections while maintaining

unity. Tempos change from fast to slow and back again. Within these tempos, rhythms vary and there is an occasional "rubato" phrase which frees the pianist from strict tempo allowing for his own creative interpretation of the collection of notes that is free of strict rhythmic restraint. The artist who interprets this music uses his outward eye to read the notation of the sound Chopin wanted and his inward eye to interpret it. Dynamics undulate and then surprise. Harmonies are pleasingly unpredictable. Each section has a different personality or color, but they all relate to each other because they all have specific compositional elements in common. The artist knows how many times he can repeat a phrase to create tension and not boredom. He knows how to build up a tremendously excited section and then form a transition from it to a rhapsodic ballad. The listener is not tired or bored at the completion of the performance, he is satisfied with the work as a whole as well as with particular sections of it. The work is composed of formal and philosophical tensions and resolutions held in a similar precarious yet joyous unity.



As with a piece of music, a masterful painting is composed of balances and imbalances to form a precarious unity or a dynamic balance. Structure gives the various elements cohesion. The canvas is broken up into several areas depending on the image the artist wants to create. Some shapes are large and simple and some are small and complicated. Each area or shape must interrelate dynamically with the other shapes or areas. Unless the structure of the painting is secure, the painting will not succeed. The painter then works to create the illusion of space by assigning each shape a value or color. One shape may be very dark while the next shape is very light. This contrast will attract the viewer's attention. More subtle gradations or value differences accompany the painting's primary focal point. Without the quieter sections, the louder sections would not be so pronounced. Imagine a checkerboard of black and white. There is no variation, just black and white squares. Not one pair would hold any interest over the others. Now, imagine the same checkerboard pattern but instead of all the squares being black and white, only one

pair is black and white. The other squares still hold the pattern but the value difference between the squares in these pairs is very small compared with the value difference between the black and white pair. When the black and white pair is accompanied by a grey checkerboard, it speaks loudly, but when all the pairs are of the same value, the principle pair is anonymous. The artist uses these principles, among others, to create a measure of dynamics in his work.

Textural variations give different sections of the painting individuality and can also be used to unify the painting. A well-placed pattern can be just the spark to break up a painting that is too texturally monotonous. Different brush strokes also give the painting varying tempos and rhythms. Textural variation can move the viewer's eye around the piece just as textural variation entices the listener to follow a great symphonic work.



Colors are determined by the expressive qualities desired in the painting. It is not enough to choose those colors that are readily observed. Rather, the painter intensifies and mutes those colors or changes them altogether according to his own expressive palette. Again, the artist responds with inward and outward eyes. The colors must interact harmoniously to create that illusive dynamic balance. In his Interaction of Color (1963), Josef Albers, one of the most prominent color theorists of this century writes:

"In musical compositions  
so long as we hear merely single tones, we do not hear music  
Hearing music depends on the recognition of the in-between tones,  
of their placing and of their spacing.

In writing, a knowledge of spelling has nothing to do  
with an understanding  
of poetry.

Equally, a factual identification of colors within a given painting  
has nothing to do with a sensitive seeing  
nor with an understanding of the color action within the painting.

Our study of color differs fundamentally from a study which anatomically dissects colorants (pigments) and physical qualities (wavelength).

Our concern is the interaction of color; that is seeing what happens between colors.

We are able to hear a single tone.

But we almost never (that is, without special devices) see a single color unconnected and unrelated to other colors.

Colors present themselves in continuous flux, constantly related to changing neighbors and changing conditions.

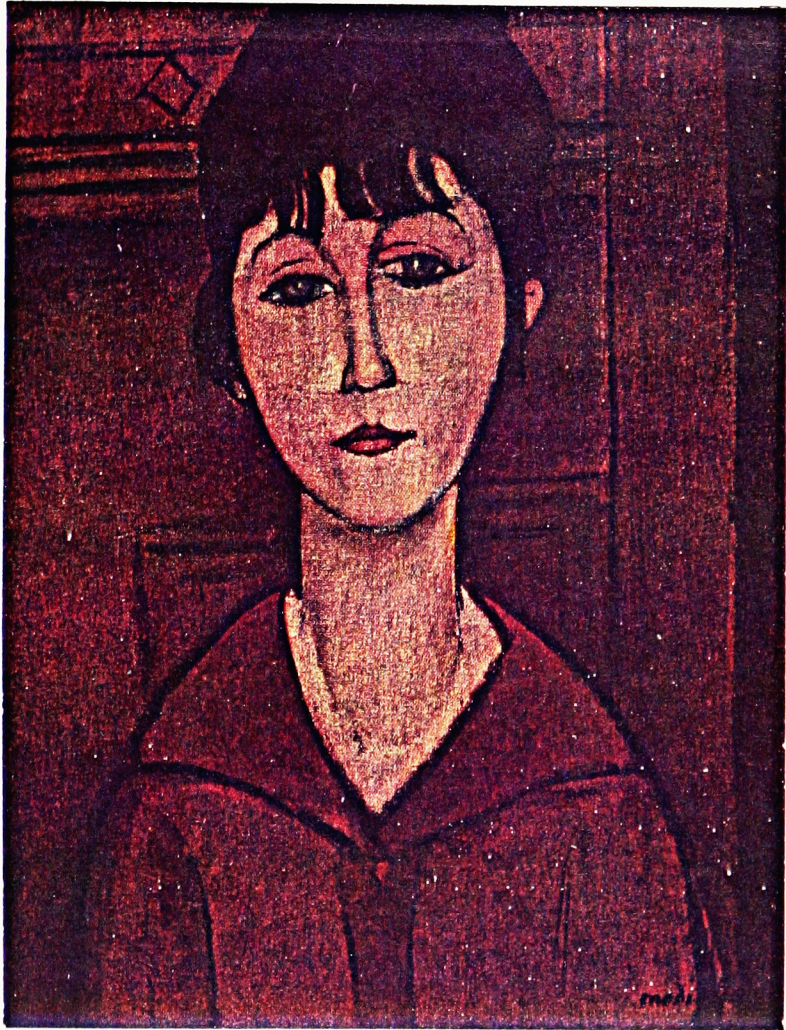
As a consequence, this proves for the reading of color what Kandinsky often demanded for the reading of art: what counts is not the what but the how."<sup>4</sup>

A color is always chosen for the way it interacts with the colors around it. As Albers states, a color is never seen naturally as single color any more than a note is heard singly in a piece of music. A color's success is measured in its ability to interact with the colors around it. Its expressive quality is determined by the way it relates to its environment. For example, a bright white square encircling a dark black square makes the dark black square speak much more loudly than a dark green square encircling the dark, black

square. Careful attention is given to color choice in an effort to achieve the desired expressive qualities.

Just as the composer knows that repetition can create excitement, the fine artist knows that repetition can create excitement and unity in a painting. Unlike the medium of music, a painting is viewed in its entirety at the same time that it is viewed in small parts. For this reason, repetition can add excitement and unity to a painting at the same time. Repetition in shape and color can create an expressive quality, but only when artfully applied so that expressive unity is produced. The artist works with his inward and outward eyes to make those important decisions concerning the amount of repetition and each placement on the canvas.

The best way to comprehend these formal concerns is to look at a good piece of art and analyse it. The work chosen here is Modigliani's Head of a Woman (1918). Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920) was an Italian painter who achieved fame with his haunting portraits. He lived a short,





troubled, and chaotic life leaving behind paintings that still intrigue.

Modigliani's Head of a Woman , like most of his work, is a portrait. It illustrates the formal elements which have been discussed in the preceding paragraphs. An underlying structure gives the painting cohesion. The repeated diamond shapes give the piece movement. The woman's face is one diamond; her collar forms two more; her eyes and mouth form yet more diamonds and a very clearly painted diamond peeks from behind the woman's head. The horizontal and vertical lines break up the space into dynamic sections. There are long, slow passages and short, fast ones. The last column on the right is a very important element in the painting for its color and position contribute to the mysterious quality of the painting.

Color is carefully chosen for a dynamic balance. A full tonal range is used. The burgundy of the woman's blouse is repeated in her lips and hints of it are evident in her face.

The warmth of the colors is repeated in the background color which has a little more yellow in it. Strong shadow lines help create space between the woman and the door. The mysterious column to the right has a value approaching that of the woman's hair. This value relationship is necessary for the proper dynamic balance. Without the dark column, the dark value of the hair would be too localized and the figure would not interact with her environment. The result would be a painting that was not successful because its value elements did not interact enough.

The viewer's attention is immediately drawn to the subject of the painting because of the value contrast between the woman's black hair next to her light, warm face. The woman's eyes are painted with a smokey green color. Again, the difference in value between the face and the eyes calls the viewer's attention at once. The complimentary colors, the green of her eyes and the reds of the rest of the painting contribute to that focus of attention as well.

Analytically, this painting has the illusive, dynamic balance necessary for success. Yet, even with all the analytical attributes, a painting needs that "je ne sais quois" that makes it compelling. This woman is an individual who has known suffering and joy. Her eyes speak to the viewer engaging him in a philosophical discourse because behind that mask-like face, there is a soul. The effect is beyond analytical construction. Barbara D. Holender's poem, Portrait by Modigliani, puts into words the effect of a Modigliani portrait on her.

Portrait by Modigliani

Gazing upon this flat unseeing face  
Disquieting calm in pale distortion  
Is to confront the formal paraphrase  
Of inexpressible and secret vision.

I have seen such a face before  
When I have come to you from dreams so clear  
That flesh and dreams distorted by their fusion  
Press within the eyes' encircling frame  
In that unfocused instant before time  
Provided that third dimension.  
I dared not speak of this but as illusion-  
Though my heart knew it held a moment's grace-  
Yet I believed that lovely imitation  
Which gave to fleeting truth a form and place.<sup>5</sup>

-Barbara D. Holender

Holender's poem documents her response to a Modigliani portrait. The collaboration of Modigliani's inward and outward eyes rendered a piece of art that communicated with Holender and helped her to reexperience some truth as if for the first time.



Modigliani's Head of a Woman is compelling in its expressive and conceptual qualities. The viewer responds to the work conceptually and expressively in part because of the artist's formal choices, but those choices were made by an individual according to his mental state, concepts and perceptions. The painting is as much a product of Modigliani's spirituality and philosophical concerns as it is a product of his craftsmanship.

In conclusion, the use of formal techniques (color, repetition, texture, value, etc.) add to the dynamics and unity of the painting. Formal technique, however, is not enough to create a work of art. A good painting is produced by a collaboration between the philosophical concerns, formal techniques, and perceptual abilities of the artist; the collaboration of inward and outward eyes.

## Chapter 3: Philosophical Concerns

Life is a natural process of such tensions, balances, rhythms; it is these that we feel in quietness or emotion as the pulse our own living.<sup>6</sup>

Susanne Langer

It is not enough to create a painting analytically. If that were the case, machines and well-trained technicians could work with certain formulas to create art. A work of art is more than a well-constructed design, it is an image that speaks to some part of the viewer's being, some experience or emotion and the interaction is intriguing. What is the magic ingredient that can transform a design to art? The magic ingredient in the creative process is the artist.

One doesn't choose to be an artist. Either one is or one isn't. The artist is a human being who has always studied art and has always studied some aspect of life. The two seem to be collaborative if not at some times synonymous. Some experience, emotion, or idea may fascinate him as it can be recreated by a combination of colors and technique. All that he is (his experiences, his ideas, his mannerisms) and all that is around him (his friends, his workplace, his home, his tools) mesh when he creates. The artist is a person who experiences and thinks like others but has a heightened ability to perceive and interpret those experiences, ideas, and emotions. He can depict his subject in a unique way causing the viewer to respond to the artwork in a way that is not easily translated into the language of words. This quality defies analysis but if it is there it is unmistakable. It is a quality generated by one human spirit which communicates to another.

In order to work effectively, the artist has to be aware of himself. Sometimes an artist does not feel especially creative and no amount of external pressure can force him to create good artwork. These "dry" periods afflict most artists. The anguish they cause the artist can be considerable but often these periods are followed by a tremendous impetus to work. This impetus is equally uncontrollable. He can try to hasten the passage of "dry" periods but he cannot hope to conquer them.

Artists know that some days "the muse" is sitting on someone else's shoulder. An artist must develop and work with his own creative process. Part of the process is to get in the right mental state with the heightened awareness and perception required for creativity. Artists usually have a set method of doing this. Miriam Shapiro, a well-known contemporary artist explains her method:

"I am serious about the image I make. That is a given. I never waiver from my ambition -- indeed, my compulsion -- to do something significant. Yet I cannot just walk into my studio and do something significant. I

have developed a way of getting down to work that is probably best thought of as a way of playing."<sup>7</sup>

Her preparatory work is a kind of blood bath. She gathers all her papers and paints and plays with materials in every way she can think of. Through this play, she gets the feel of the paints and the paper. She loses herself in the process of this play. After that stage, she washes her hands and makes images freely and mindlessly. She plays for several days moving from one stage to another in an effort to rediscover her early childhood. In that period she worked because she had fun. It was a time when she was more innocent and instinctive in her approach.

Finally after several days of constructive playing she can't stand anymore of it and she is ready to work. She explains,

"Then I lay out my palette, get my brushes together, get my equipment, my tapes, my fabrics. I make my canvas ready and begin to paint. There is inside me always a fragile, unarmed creature,

timid, and self-doubting. As my painting grows, I watch this creature, this child-woman change, become stronger, more assertive, alive, happier and freer in her movements."<sup>8</sup>

Shapiro has developed a method that enables her to get in the right mental state for creativity. Through this method she relives the experiences that have led to her current level of artistic perception as well as creativity. She deepens her awareness of herself, her materials, and her surroundings until she has reached the point where she is ready to work.

Every artist has a different way of preparing himself for work. Each becomes acutely aware of the necessary steps to be taken before the required mind-set is achieved. Steps are not to be skipped because this would interrupt the flow and rhythm of the process. The artist knows himself -- he knows what works for him and what doesn't.



The creative process is one often laden with struggles, surprises, and discoveries. When creating, the artist becomes aware of his "self" and that which is "non-self". Everything that affects the artist and materials can effect the work produced. The type of materials used influence the way he crafts; his philosophical or psychological concerns may determine subject and method. In effect, the artist becomes "one" with all that he is and all that influences him. This interrelation of all things is integral to the creative and expressive processes.

During particularly creative periods the artist will encounter new discoveries or surprises. Some are good and some are bad. Tensions and resolutions are experienced as they are produced. In a sense, the artist is his artwork; he is "one" with it. The work may seem to slow in tempo and the artist will feel the lethargy. His response may be to liven the tempo with a jazzy color or a more active texture. At other times the works will surprise the painter. Perhaps an underpainting color will give the needed spark to a

section. The periods of struggle cause a great deal of tension but they can be resolved by an interaction between the artist, his materials, and his environment. The periods of struggle seem necessary and the artist must acknowledge their part in the creative process.



## Chapter 4: Today's Woman

An interest in a particular subject is the impetus for a painter's inward and outward expression onto canvas. Reasons for this interest may vary, but if the artist does not feel moved in some way, his work will lack integrity. The work will fail to interest the painter and its effect upon the viewer will be the same. Since Today's Woman has been the interest of this artist, a complete examination of the expressions and perceptions associated with this subject is required.

Once the artist has decided to paint Today's Woman on canvas he must evaluate his own feelings about Today's Woman. He must determine what caused him to feel this way.

Listening to many different women gives him information. Reading literature about women written by women can give more information. When the artist feels he has completed enough research he must evaluate his feelings and perceptions about Today's Woman.

The next step is to see how the masters have dealt with this subject. How did they portray the women of their time and why? What makes the portraits succeed as paintings? Careful evaluation should be made at this level as well.

As the artist develops a drawing and applies colors and textures to that drawing, he makes choices (conscious and unconscious) based upon all that he has learned and upon all that influences him during the process. Certain dynamics, rhythms, melodies and harmonies work together in the evolution of the piece. The piece is a collaboration between all that the artist is and of all that influences the artist. All is one.

Susanne Langer's quote ends with, "Life is a natural process of such tensions, balances, rhythms; it is these that we feel in quietness or emotion as the pulse of our own living." There are many parallels between painting and Today's Woman.

Today's Woman must be aware of herself. She must search within herself to discover the elements which compose her. Rediscovery of her life experiences and acknowledgement of their formulating impact is necessary to her developing awareness.

It is also necessary for Today's Woman to become aware of her environment and its influences. To deny any part of it is to deny herself. Upon careful inventory, Today's Woman will discover that Susanne Langer's words hold truth.

Today's Woman faces many new challenges (some are not really new, just newly acknowledged). If a woman is to have a well-balanced life it must contain imbalances as well as balances (just as with a balanced painting). No one's life is perfect and that is a blessing. How boring our lives would be if everything in them was good! It takes a few disasters to make a triumph triumphant. Good fails to exist without bad. Resolutions fail to exist without tensions. Balance fails to exist without imbalance. Outward harmony fails to exist without inward harmony.

One of the major reasons why women have a difficult time developing a dynamically balanced life is that their role in today's society is too ambiguous. The ambiguity results because women have been brought up to follow not one model of womanhood but several. When Today's Woman was a small child, the model of womanhood was the woman who always wore dresses with aprons and took care of her family. She was always there when you needed her and she did her best to make

everyone else comfortable. Womanhood was synonymous with motherhood. Everyone was mothered, even Daddy.

When Today's Woman started puberty, another model of womanhood was set in front of her, one opposing directly the old model with which she had grown up. She had felt a security knowing the role she was to fill, but all that security was destroyed. Just when she started to think she had her life under control, not only did her body betray her, but society changed the role it had determined for her. To make matters worse, that society was divided and at war over this role. Society finally started to accept the new role and young girls were forced to change their entire way of thinking about themselves.

The change in role was drastic. Away with woman as mother and in with woman as, well, man. Complete equality was the demand and nothing short of it would do. Women were to develop their own careers outside of the home. They should never allow any man to stand in their way. Tremendous

antagonism developed between men and women as well as between women and women. The concept of women as nurturing beings was scorned by the new breed of women. Betty Friedan, a leader in the women's movement explains the drastic change in the concept of women:

"In the first stage, our aim was full participation, power and voice in the mainstream, inside the party, the political process, the professions, the business world. But we diverted from our dream. And in our reaction against the feminine mystique, which defined women solely in terms of their relation to men as wives, mothers and homemakers, we sometimes seemed to fall into the feminist mystique which denied that core of women's personhood that is fulfilled through love, nurture, home."<sup>9</sup>

Women seemingly owed it to their sex to achieve greatly. However, women who achieved greatly were reminded by others that they had to still remember their children and families. This concept gave birth to the Superwoman complex. Women felt they had to do everything extremely well, better than anyone else. They felt they had to perform the best in their career field, be the most artful lover, and then be the best



mother. Women had to be able to do everything well at the same time. If a woman failed to be great in any one area, she was consumed by guilt.

Of course, women could not meet the exacting standards of the Superwoman complex. Ellen Goodman, noted journalist and a 1963 graduate of Radcliffe College has written: "We were the first generation of superwomen. We were the women who would -- in fact, should -- have dazzling careers and brilliant satisfied husbands, and remarkable, well-adjusted children."<sup>10</sup> The strain for women under the superwoman complex resulted in more and more stress. Something had to change. An interesting phenomenon began to surface in the late seventies. More and more career woman (of the superwomen stock) aged thirty-five and over began a baby boom. These women who had polarized themselves against the restraints of children were making the voluntary choice to have them. Many women were tormented by the knowledge that their childbearing years were coming to an end and they needed to have children to fill the compelling emptiness they



felt. Still, in making this choice, these women risked their very dear careers. Why were so many of these women willing to take that risk? Perhaps, they had come to realize their need to nurture and be nurtured in this special way. Perhaps, these women had consciously or subconsciously rediscovered their childhood time of security and happiness. That childhood involved the old model of womanhood. These women needed some balance in their lives and they needed to acknowledge their entire personhood, past, present, and future. They needed a balance they could live with.

The balance between family and work is not static or without tension. Women are still closing one door as they open another. All too often choices rather than compromises are made. Friedan provides a list of the pressing questions women ask:

"How can I have it all? Do I really have to choose?"

"How can I have the career I want and the kind of marriage I want, and be a good mother?"

"How can I get him to share more responsibility at home? Why do I always have to be the one with the children, making the decisions at home?"

"I can't count on marriage for my security -- look what happened to my mother -- but can I get all my security from my career?"

"Can I make it in a man's world, doing it the man's way? What other way is there? But what is it doing to me? Do I want to be like men?"

"What do I have to give up? What are the tradeoffs?"

"Will the jobs open to me now still be there if I stop to have children?"

"Does it really work, that business of 'quality, not quantity' of time with the children? How much is enough?"

"How can I fill my loneliness, except with a man?"

"Do men really want an equal woman?"

"Why are men today so gray and lifeless, compared to women? How can I find a man I can really look up to?"

"How can I play the sex kitten now? Can I ever find a man who will let me be myself?"

"If I put off having a baby till I'm thirty-eight and can call my own shots on the job, will I ever have kids?"

"How can I juggle it all?"

"How can I put it all together?"

"Can I risk losing myself in marriage?"

"Do I have to be a superwoman?"<sup>11</sup>

Women are finding the feminist mystique as uncomfortable as the feminine mystique. They cannot ignore their need for family or their need for fulfillment in workplace. Both institutions must be restructured and modified because they are simply obsolete as they are now. Freidan laments that changes in these institutions will be slow because the problems necessitating change are perceived to be women's problems and not men's.<sup>12</sup> But men are changing as well. They are tired of their traditional roles. The job picture is

dismal putting too much pressure on the traditional breadwinner. Also, men are beginning to acknowledge their need to nurture and be nurtured.

Friedan insists that Today's Woman must transcend the false polarizations between women and men, feminist and family, women and women. The second stage must be a restructuring of the institutions of work and family enabling both men and women to live happier more fulfilled lives together.<sup>13</sup> Easier said than done. For now, Today's Woman struggles with questions that need to be dealt with in order to form a personal philosophy by which to live a dynamically balanced life. The difficult questions confronting Today's Women must be acknowledged. The questions may not always have answers but still they must be acknowledged. Women must rediscover their past so that they can live the present more successfully. They have to know who they are and understand their environment in order to work successfully toward a dynamically balanced life.

All of these expressions, tensions, and perceptions contribute in an understanding of Today's Woman through a painting. The unsureness of one's role in today's society and in today's family weighs heavily in the artist's expression. As with the mystery conveyed in Modigliani's painting, these perceptions are not easily conveyed through more formal methods.

## Chapter 5: Synthesis

For the past two years, I have concentrated my efforts on paintings involving the female personality. I have always enjoyed drawing people. They represented a challenge unlike that of drawing anything else. It was never enough to document features. Rather, I strove to draw real people, people who embodied both goodness and badness. The decision to paint people in a representational style was not reached quickly. Like the other elements of my style, it was chosen after considerable experimentation.

I have always drawn. I cannot remember a time when a I have not. Drawing was something I liked doing and I especially liked the fact that no one forced me to do it. It was peaceful. I suppose the fact that adults kept telling me and my parents how talented I was encouraged me, but that, in itself, was not enough. It was not enough that others liked what I did; it mattered only that I liked to draw.

When I took lessons or classes, I spent most of my time trying different techniques and styles. For the longest time, I could not decide on my own style. In fact, it was not until I went to graduate school that I got the guidance that I needed and my style formed. My professor instructed me to read about many artists and study their work carefully. He also helped me to develop my own style by identifying those elements in my painting which held the most truth. If the painting did not work, it was because it lacked style, integrity, or unity.



Gradually, I have developed a representational style which has a graphic quality about it. I have found the tension and solidity this style creates most satisfying. There is a strength generated that seems to describe my subject, Today's Woman.

When I first found that painting women interested me, I asked myself why? Painting women satisfied two challenges that I enjoyed meeting. One challenge was to capture a personality on canvas and the other challenge was to develop and express my own personal philosophy by which to live. One challenge was formal in nature and the other philosophical.

The formal challenge has not been insignificant. I had spent most of my time in art classes playing. I experimented with many styles ranging from chance to photorealism. I had fun with all of them but the time had come for me to develop a style that came from my own experiences and concerns. It was a difficult task. What style was honestly me, and which styles were merely attempts to please the teacher, my

parents, my friends, or galleries? What style of art appealed to me? What temperament did I have? What did I value in life? These questions, among others, have helped me to develop a style that feels honest.

I found myself drawn to clean graphics and abstract realism. Matisse held my interest because of his color, composition, and patterning. Modigliani's haunting portraits spoke of a spirituality beyond portraiture. I also acknowledged treatments that I did not care for. The paintings of Pearlstein, a contemporary realist painter, in which he painted women decapitated or otherwise mutilated by the limits of the canvas, seemed offensive. The women were painted solely as objects. It was as important to recognize what did not appeal to me as it was to recognize what did.

What did I seek in a painting? I sought a sense of order and a painting that communicated with the viewer on formal and philosophical levels. Chance paintings interested me but, the relationship was more like infatuation than true

love. I could find only limited interest in the psychological aspects of the painting and painter. They soon held only a little more interest for me than ink blots. I wanted to see more evidence that the painter had made specific decisions. I wanted to see that the painter had worked on his concepts before he attacked the canvas.

Photorealism was a technical challenge and it seemed superficial. At the very least, it seemed that if a person wanted that kind of image, he could just take a photograph. I understood the political and social concepts behind the style but those concepts were not pressing issues for me. It seemed too technical and not spiritual enough for my tastes.

I worked with seemingly little results for a year and a half. Finally, I just gave up trying to paint what seemed right and I painted what felt right. My style had emerged. I had had to struggle for a period and then just paint. At some point, my brain had assimilated all the information I had acquired and I did not have to struggle with it anymore.

Because my subject has been Today's Woman, I spent months reading about Today's Woman. I had to learn as much as I could about her in order to be honest. Then I meshed that information with my own feelings and came up with my own concept of Today's Woman (the concepts were discussed in the previous chapter). Today's Woman is in a period of transition. She is strong, yet, sometimes weak; she strives for independence and needs partnership; and she must interact with her environment (people, place, situation) to live effectively and in dynamic balance.

My method for working is the same every time I set out to paint. I have an idea and I look for images that evoke the responses relevant to that idea. I pour over fashion and architectural magazines until something seems to evoke one of the right responses. I then rip out the photographs and take out my drawing pad. I collage elements together in the drawing adding elements from my own imagination as they seem appropriate. I draw until one of the drawings looks right. Then I jot down palette possibilities and notate possible

colors in particular areas. It is necessary to put the drawings away for a while if there is time. Later, I go back and see if I should make some changes.

When I feel ready to commit a drawing to canvas, I make the frame and stretch the canvas. Then I prime the canvas with four coats of white paint and one coat of medium gray paint. The medium gray drawing surface makes me more conscious of the full value range when drawing. The drawing is applied with burnt umber paint. After the drawing is finished, I paint an underpainting. The colors are mostly compliments of the colors which will be painted later. The underpainting serves two purposes: 1) it enables me to work out color and drawing problems, and 2) it gives the final painting's colors a richness and dimension. The last stage is to paint the final application. This last stage always seems to be the most frustrating. Colors are changed over and over again until they are just right. Technical difficulties that did not appear before are glaring. The war wages on until the painting is resolved or painted over.



While the procedure is the same every time, it does not make the process very easy. In every painting there seems to be a pattern of difficulty. In the beginning, I work endlessly and, seemingly, fruitlessly to come up with a drawing. As I draw and paint, I make decisions based on my own formal and philosophical concerns and perceptual abilities. When I have a drawing that seems right, I am excited and ready to go. Shortly after the underpainting stage, a long period of struggle sets in. When the muse permits, I am able to resolve the painting and I am happy for a few hours.

The struggle I endure in painting seems necessary for a successful painting. Struggles are necessary for a successful life as well. Without them, people can not enjoy the good times. Everyone needs to experience a full range of experiences in order to lead a dynamically balanced life. Without the struggle, the resulting success is not as satisfying. If something is too easy, it fails to hold interest because it fails to challenge. There must always be

more questions than ready answers. The resulting elements of mystery and challenge hold interest.

When I paint, I experience the questions, formal and philosophical. There is an interaction between all that I am and all that surrounds me. There is always a mysterious period when all is one. For a brief instant, Life and Art are one. What is produced is a reflection of Life.



## Illustrations



The Soothsayer 22" x 36"





Musician 30" x 40"



Sibyl 22" x 26"







Wisdom of the Cat 32" x 36"



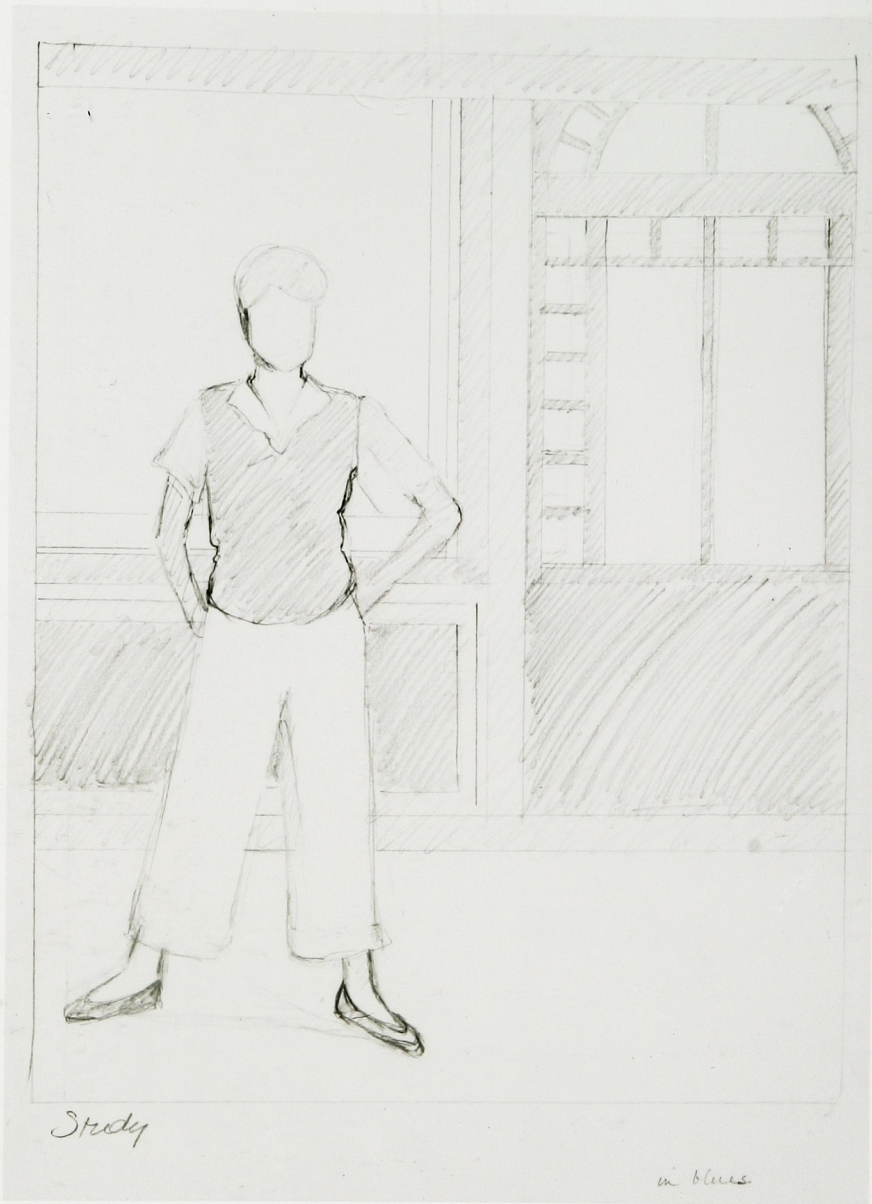






Bethany

32" x 36"







Omen 32" x 34"





Prophetess 26" x 40"

# Footnotes

1. Susanne Langer, Problems of Art (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1957),p.8.
2. Charles Earle Funk, Litt.D.,ed., Funk and Wagnalls New College, Standard Dictionary of the English Language (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1947), p.871.
3. Langer,p.8.
4. Josef Albers, Interaction of Color (New Haven: Yale University Press,1963),p.5.
5. Barbara D. Holender, "Portrait by Modigliani," in Modigliani, Pierre Sichel (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1967), p.541.
6. Langer, p.8.
7. Miriam Shapiro, "Notes from a Conversation on Art, Feminism, and Work," in Working it Out, eds., Sara Ruddick and Pamela Daniels (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), p.304.
8. Shapiro, p.305.
9. Betty Friedan, The Second Stage (New York: Summit Books, 1981), p.27.

10. Friedan, p.32.

11. Friedan, pp.34-35.

12. Friedan, p. 28.

13. Friedan, p. 41.

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